

## L O U N G E R.

[ N<sup>o</sup> XIV. ]

Saturday, May 7. 1785.

THEY who live in the bustle of the world, are not perhaps the best or most accurate observers of the progressive change of manners in that society in which they pass their time. In such a situation, we adopt the modes and manners of those with whom we live, with so much ease and facility, that any change is hardly perceptible, or if perceived, leaves but a slight impression. Like the alteration produced by time upon the human form, though we know that there is a constant change, we do not observe it in those with whom we are daily accustomed to associate. A stranger in a foreign land sees many beauties, and discovers many deformities, which escape the eye of a native. To the stranger, every object is new; it strikes his imagination, it calls forth his attention, and he views and considers it in all its various lights. In judging indeed of what he sees, his national prejudices may be apt to mislead him; he may suppose defects where in truth there are none, and he may exaggerate slight imperfections into capital faults.

A person who after living a number of years in retirement returns again into society, is somewhat in the situation of the foreigner. Like him, he is apt to be misled by prejudices; but, like him too, he remarks many things which escape the observation of those whose sensations are blunted by habit, and whose attention is less awake to the objects around them.

It was this which afforded me so much amusement in the conversation of my new acquaintance *Colonel Caustic*, of which I gave my readers some account in a former paper. Like the *Sleepers*, when they entered the city of Antioch, Colonel Caustic, on coming to Edinburgh after forty years residence in the country, found a total change in the appearance, in the dress, the manners, and the customs of its inhabitants. Every man perhaps, at an advanced age, is, more or less, a *laudator temporis acti*, and naturally feels a predilection for those happy days when novelty added to the charms of life, and gave a zest to every enjoyment. If to this natural feeling be joined any particular cause of disgust; if, like Colonel Caustic, a man has been driven from society by any particular disappointment or misfortune; if in silence and in solitude he has suffered his distresses to prey upon his mind; if he has fondly brooded over them for a long course of years; he must indeed be endowed by nature with a more than common share of philanthropy, to be able to come back into the world without discovering marks of sourness and chagrin.

To those causes must be ascribed the severity of my friend Caustic's observations. All his natural good sense and benevolence of disposition could not prevent him from being hurt and affected by a thou-

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and little improprieties which he perceived, or fancied that he perceived.

But I had some time ago an opportunity of seeing my friend Caustic in a situation where, it must be owned, there was some reason for severity of remark. In a former paper, I mentioned the pleasure I received from attending him to the theatre. As we were waiting in the passage till we could get chairs, we found Mr B——, a contemporary of Caustic's, waiting for his carriage. Mr B. expressed much satisfaction at seeing his old acquaintance; and after a gentle reproof on the score of visiting, he begged that Caustic and I would do him the honour to dine with him, *à propos*, that day week. Caustic, after stealing a look at me, accepted of the invitation; and I, at the same time, agreed to be of the party. When Mr B. left us, Caustic, who had not seen him for many years, asked me some questions with regard to his situation in life. "Why," replied I, "he has become very rich, and it is his chief wish that his friends should enjoy his wealth. He lives *en Prince*, as you will see." — "When I knew him," said Caustic, "he was poor enough; but though a little vain now and then, he was upon the whole a good well-disposed man."

Upon the day appointed, I attended Caustic to Mr B's. We went precisely at four o'clock, which he had informed us was his hour. Upon entering the house, I found the servants waiting in the hall, dressed out in their laced liveries, with a look of insolent importance in their faces; and there was an air of preparation in every thing we saw, from the gilded knockers at the gate to the Gobelins tapestry in the drawing room. Soon after we entered the room, the servant announced Lady —. Upon hearing her name, Caustic started from his chair with an uncommon degree of satisfaction in his countenance. Lady — was a beauty of the last age, when Caustic was a gay and fashionable man about town. In the height of her beauty, she had retired from the world to dedicate her time to the education of her children. At the age of sixty-five, she still retains an eye expressive of that tempered vivacity, that animated benignity and goodness, which equally attracts our regard and commands our respect. In every thing she says, she discovers a sound understanding, accompanied with a most engaging cheerfulness of disposition, not abated by age, and perhaps rather heightened by the pleasing reflection on a life spent in the uniform practice of every virtue. Lady — and Caustic had not met for many years. It was with pleasure I saw the respectful, yet affectionate manner with which my friend now addressed her, and the kind affability with which she on her part received his compliments.

The conversation soon turned upon the improvements of this city. Our landlord spoke with much fluency on this subject; and, addressing himself to Caustic, observed, that formerly Edinburgh was in a manner uninhabitable; that thirty years ago there was not a house fit for a gentleman to live in; that the pleasures of society were then unknown; and that we now only begin to know how to live. Caustic admitted, that as a *town* Edinburgh no doubt was improved: "But you must forgive me," added he, "for doubting if the society of Edinburgh has improved in an equal degree." "Unquestionably it has," said Mr B. "You must remember the time when there was not a dinner to be had in any house in town, when the men  
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“ passed their whole time in taverns, and the women were left alone, to amuse themselves as they best could.” “ There is some truth in the observation,” said Lady —; “ but yet, upon the whole, those were not bad times.” “ I agree with your ladyship,” said Colonel Caustic. “ It is true, we did not then inhabit palaces, and we seldom saw those sumptuous entertainments, where one sits, *entre l’etiquette et l’ennui*, labouring through two courses and a desert, as I had the misfortune to do but yesterday, placed between a lady who did not chuse to say any thing, and a gentleman who spoke of nothing but the excellence of the cook, and who, in the fulness of his heart, communicated to me a new mode of dressing *currie*, which he had just received from a friend high in office at Calcutta, by the last express over land. For my part,” added the Colonel, “ I would not exchange an hour passed in the society I have had the honour to see assembled in your Ladyship’s drawing-room, for twenty such dinners. There a conversation, at once gay and polite, afforded the highest entertainment of which a rational creature is capable. There I have seen a *Hume* trifling with the beautiful and the young, and at the same time communicating knowledge and instruction in a manner the most pleasing, simple, and unaffected. There I have seen a *Hamilton* submitting his verses to the correction and criticism of a fair circle, who did not trust alone to beauty the most superior for the preservation of their empire over mankind. There I have seen”——“ Hold, hold, my good friend,” said Lady —, “ if you run on at this rate, those ladies (bowing to two young ladies, who sat opposite to her) will think you as unreasonably partial to your old friends, as unjust in your estimate of modern manners.” Here the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of some additional guests, among whom there was an old gentleman, who, notwithstanding his age, seemed to possess a great flow of animal spirits, and who addressed every person in company with the same undistinguishing familiarity, and vulgar coarseness of manner. Caustic looked at Lady — with an air of triumph.

Our landlord now began to discover symptoms of uneasiness. He had more than once informed us that the Countess of —, Lord C. Sir W. D. and several other persons of fashion, were to be of the party, not one of whom had hitherto appeared, although it was long past the hour of dinner. At length, our ears were assailed with a loud noise in the stair-case, and the door opening, Lord C. Sir W. D. and two other young men, rushed into the room, with their hair uncombed, and in every respect in the most complete dishevel. Without paying the least attention to any one person in company, they began to tell us of the excellent sport they had that morning enjoyed at a cock-fight.

But this recital was cut short by the servant’s announcing the Countess of —; who, without the smallest apology for making the company wait dinner for near two hours, walked up to a large mirror at one end of the room, and, adjusting a curl, asked Lord C. what made him leave D——’s so soon last night? “ We had a charming party, and did not sup till two this morning. Before supper I won 50 from D—— at Piquette: but I believe I had the advantage of him; for he had rather drank too much wine with you at dinner.”

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"Your son was of the party," added she, turning to the old gentleman; "I got some of his money too. But what has become of him? he promised to meet me here to-day."—"O the graceless dog, I know nothing of him."—At that instant, the young man entered the room, and we were immediately called to dinner. At table, Lady——contrived to place her friend Caustic next to her; and they were so much ingrossed with their own conversation, that they paid little attention to that of the company, which was carried on by the Countess and her fashionable friends, in the same strain in which it had begun. Our landlord was busied in displaying the elegance of the entertainment, and was particularly solicitous to call Caustic's attention to it. "How do you like my champagne?" "I am no connoisseur, I seldom drink champagne," said Caustic dryly. "It is damn'd good," said Lord C.; "it is as good as we used to drink with our ambassador at Paris last year. I was sent thither by my father to learn to speak French; but I spent my time to much better purpose. I was admitted a member of the Cricket club, and kept no other company." "I did not know," said I, "that cricket had been known in France." "Neither is it among your French fellows; they have not genius for it. Our club were to a man all *Anglois*, as they called us. At first the French were confoundedly surprised to see us on the plains of Sablons, playing with our servants, all stripped to the buff."

After much conversation, equally edifying, the ladies at length retired, and our landlord began to push the bottle briskly about. The old gentleman seemed to be particularly pleased with this; and his son enjoyed it no less. The father told us anecdotes of his son's debaucheries, and the son amused us with stories of his father's licentiousness. Caustic was shocked to the last degree at this exhibition. He made a signal to me, that he wished to retire. Before we could accomplish that, the old man got hold of the bottle, and, filling a bumper, asked leave to give a toast, and then roared out a *sentiment*, as he called it, in terms most shockingly gross and indecent. "Well done, my old boy," exclaimed the son;—"here goes in a bumper; and may we all, at your age, be as jolly and as wicked as you are."

Caustic could endure this no longer; he quitted the company, and I followed him. When we were alone, he asked me, if such scenes were common among us? "If this," said he, "be the improvement and the refinement of which our friend B——talked so much, I hope I have done with it. Folly and impertinence may be submitted to; but the profligacy of that old man provoked me beyond measure. We need not wonder at the degeneracy of the times, if a father is to teach debauchery to his own children, and, by precept and example, to encourage their progress in vice. For my part," added he, "I consider this as a species of parricide, (if we may apply the word to a father's crime), for which no punishment is too severe."

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